READING COMPREHENSION

NELLY BLY: EXPOSING THE TRUTH!

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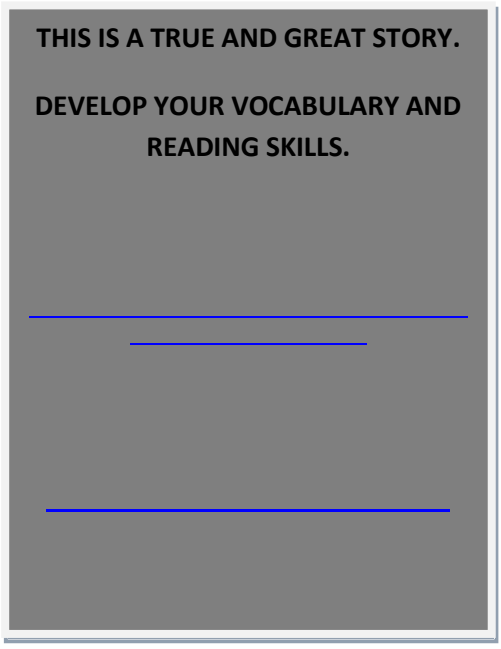

http://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Miriam-Snyder/Products
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This education lesson is a volunteer fair use ESL instructional modality. It is one of my previous volunteer ESL lessons. It is posted to encourage ESL instructional planning creativity. This is a sample ESL high interest, multicultural, multilevel, vocabulary, discourse, and reading/writing comprehension builder lesson, coupled with effective grammar exercises. The materials are designed for middle, high school, adult education, and college level intermediate ESL.

LESSON 17

NELLIE BLY
Exposing the Truth

It was the most dangerous assignment Nellie Bly was ever offered. In 1888, Joseph Pulitzer, owner of the famous newspaper *The World*, asked her to write an article for his paper. He wanted her to investigate rumors of cruelty and neglect in the New York City insane asylum on Blackwells Island. The hospital was designed to care for insane people who had no money for private treatment. There had recently been stories of patient abuse at the hospital. But because doctors would not let reporters talk to the patients, no one knew if the stories were accurate. The only way for Nellie to learn the truth was to become a patient herself. That meant she had to pretend she was crazy.

2 Nellie was willing to do that because she knew it might help those who were mentally ill. But she was worried about one thing. If she succeeded in getting into the hospital, how would she ever get out? Joseph Pulitzer told her not to worry; he promised he would take care of that. But when Nellie asked him what he intended to do, he admitted that he didn't know.

Blackwells Island Workhouse about the time Nellie Bly exposed the miserable conditions in the asylum. This photograph was taken by Jacob Riis in 1890.

He told her she would just have to trust him. Although Nellie feared that she might end up trapped behind the walls of the insane asylum forever, she agreed to go ahead with the assignment. It was her only chance to uncover the truth.

3 After agreeing to write the article, she went to a boardinghouse and rented a room. As soon as she moved in, she began to roll her eyes and act strangely. She claimed she could not remember her own name, and she accused everyone in the boardinghouse of being crazy. Within a few hours she had frightened the landlady and all the other boarders. The landlady called the police, who took Nellie to a nearby hospital for an examination. Nellie was not sure she could fool trained professionals into thinking she was insane, but to her surprise, the doctors asked her only a few very basic questions. Then they concluded that she was, indeed, hopelessly insane.

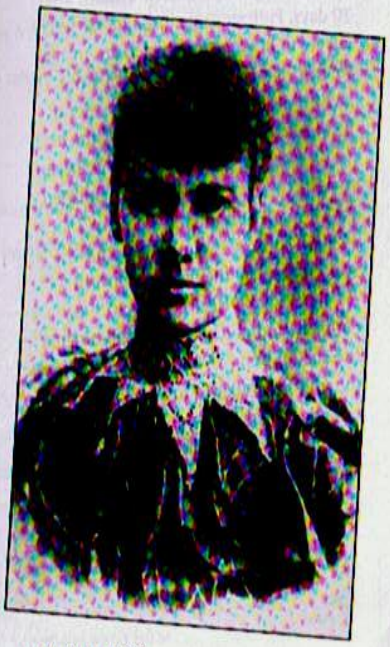
4 Because it appeared that Nellie didn't have any money, the doctors put her on a boat and shipped her off to the insane asylum on Blackwells Island. When the boat landed and she stepped ashore, a guard grabbed her. Pretending to be confused, she asked where she was. "This is a place for insane people," the guard snarled, "and you'll never leave it."

Although Nellie believed that Joseph Pulitzer would do his best to get her released, those words still sent a shiver down her spine.

5 After being admitted to the hospital, Nellie immediately dropped her disguise and started acting perfectly normal. She wanted to see how the staff would react when they realized one of their patients was not sick. To her amazement, no one noticed. When she approached a doctor to talk to him, he ignored her. The same thing happened when she tried to start a conversation with a nurse. It didn't seem to matter what Nellie said or did—everyone just assumed that her actions were those of a crazy person.

6 Nellie soon learned that the staff did not pay much attention to any of the patients. She had expected medical care at the hospital to be minimal, but she was not prepared for the kind of heartless treatment that she saw all around her. Doctors routinely ignored the requests and complaints of the patients. Nurses beat those who were uncooperative. Sometimes staff members even banged patients' heads against a wall for no reason at all.

7 Nellie was equally stunned by the filthy living conditions that prevailed throughout the hospital. Once a week nurses forced her and the other female patients to take baths in ice-cold water. In the evenings guards locked them up in tiny, unheated rooms. The staff made them sleep in thin little slips and would not give them any blankets. In the daytime nurses tied all the patients



Nellie Bly in 1890

together with ropes and led them outside like cattle for "outdoor exercise." Meals consisted of nothing more than bread, tea, and a few shriveled prunes. When Nellie tried to eat the bread, she found that it was old and stale. One morning she even found a spider in it.

8 After a couple of days in that inhumane environment, Nellie was ready to get out. When she tried to explain to a doctor that she was not sick, he simply laughed and walked away. There was nothing she could do but wait and hope that Joseph Pulitzer would keep his promise to get her released. Finally, after 10 days, Pulitzer came through. He sent a lawyer to Blackwells Island to arrange for Nellie's release. In order to get her out, the lawyer said that some of Nellie's friends had agreed to pay for private treatment.

9 As soon as Nellie was freed, she began to work on her story. When she finished, Pulitzer ran it on the front page of *The World*. The story instantly created a scandal, stirring the public's concern for the mentally ill. Health inspectors made a complete tour of the asylum and ordered the staff to improve conditions. Doctors at other hospitals began to conduct more careful examinations before declaring a person insane, and New York City increased its budget for care of the mentally ill by $1 million.

10 Nellie was delighted that her newspaper article helped to change the city's attitude toward the mentally ill. She was also happy that Joseph Pulitzer liked her work. He was so impressed, in fact, that he offered her a permanent job as a reporter for *The World*. That made her the first female reporter on Pulitzer's staff.

11 Nellie went on to write many other compelling newspaper articles. Among them were articles that exposed the poor treatment of factory workers and the struggles of the new labor unions. As one of the first women in her field, she also led the way for other female journalists. When she died in 1922, New York newspapers mourned the death of "the best reporter in America."

If you have been timed while reading this article, enter your reading time below. Then turn to the Words-per-Minute Table on page 195 and look up your reading speed (words per minute). Enter your reading speed on the graph on page 196.

Reading Time: Lesson 17

_____ : _____

Minutes *Seconds*

A Finding the Main Idea

One statement below expresses the main idea of the article. One statement is too general, or too broad. The other statement explains only part of the article; it is too narrow. Label the statements using the following key:

M—Main Idea **B—Too Broad** **N—Too Narrow**

_____ 1. Nellie Bly posed as a mentally ill person to get into the insane asylum on Blackwells Island.

_____ 2. Nellie Bly uncovered and exposed the horrors on Blackwells Island, and went on to become a great newspaper reporter.

_____ 3. Nellie Bly was one of the greatest newspaper reporters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

_____ Score 15 points for a correct M answer.

_____ Score 5 points for each correct B or N answer.

_____ **Total Score:** Finding the Main Idea

B Recalling Facts

How well do you remember the facts in the article? Put an X in the box next to the answer that correctly completes each statement about the article.

1. The insane asylum on Blackwells Island was intended for
   - ☐ a. poor people who were physically ill.
   - ☐ b. poor people who were mentally ill.
   - ☐ c. old people who had no money.
2. When Nellie stopped acting crazy, the doctors and nurses
   - ☐ a. became suspicious.
   - ☐ b. didn't notice.
   - ☐ c. put spiders in her food to frighten her.
3. When Nellie tried to talk to the doctors and nurses in the hospital, they
   - ☐ a. beat her.
   - ☐ b. ignored her.
   - ☐ c. locked her in an unheated room.
4. Nellie stayed in the insane asylum
   - ☐ a. 10 days.
   - ☐ b. five days.
   - ☐ c. two days.
5. As a result of Nellie's article, New York City
   - ☐ a. closed the hospital on Blackwells Island.
   - ☐ b. arrested the doctors at the asylum.
   - ☐ c. began spending more money on the mentally ill.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

_____ **Total Score:** Recalling Facts

C Making Inferences

When you combine your own experience and information from a text to draw a conclusion that is not directly stated in that text, you are making an inference. Below are five statements that may or may not be inferences based on information in the article. Label the statements using the following key:

C—Correct Inference F—Faulty Inference

_____ 1. The doctors who declared Nellie insane did not know much about mental illness.

_____ 2. If Joseph Pulitzer's lawyer hadn't made arrangements to have Nellie released, she might never have gotten off Blackwells Island.

_____ 3. The doctors and nurses at the insane asylum didn't have any respect for people who were mentally ill.

_____ 4. Only a very good actress could have fooled the doctors into thinking she was crazy.

_____ 5. Nellie Bly was the first person seriously interested in finding out what conditions were like on Blackwells Island.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

_____ Total Score: Making Inferences

D Using Words Precisely

Each numbered sentence below contains an underlined word or phrase from the article. Following the sentence are three definitions. One definition is closest to the meaning of the underlined word. One definition is opposite or nearly opposite. Label those two definitions using the following key. Do not label the remaining definition.

C—Closest O—Opposite or Nearly Opposite

1. She had expected medical care at the hospital to be minimal, but she was not prepared for the kind of heartless treatment that she saw all around her.

_____ a. barely satisfactory

_____ b. inexpensive

_____ c. of the highest quality

2. Nellie was equally stunned by the filthy living conditions that prevailed throughout the hospital.

_____ a. were common

_____ b. were rare

_____ c. were concealed

3. After a couple of days in that inhumane environment, Nellie was ready to get out.

_____ a. unhealthy

_____ b. caring

_____ c. cruel

4. The story instantly created a scandal, stirring the public's concern for the mentally ill.

___ a. public disgrace

___ b. occasion for awarding an honor

___ c. crisis

5. Nellie went on to write other compelling newspaper reports.

___ a. lengthy

___ b. ineffective

___ c. demanding attention

___ ___ Score 3 points for each correct C answer.

___ ___ Score 2 points for each correct O answer.

___ Total Score: Using Words Precisely

Enter the four total scores in the spaces below, and add them together to find your Reading Comprehension Score. Then record your score on the graph on page 197.

Score	Question Type	Lesson 17
___	Finding the Main Idea	
___	Recalling Facts	
___	Making Inferences	
___	Using Words Precisely	
___	Reading Comprehension Score	

Author's Approach

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer.

1. The author uses the first sentence of the article to

[ ] a. tell the reader about journalism in 1888.

[ ] b. make the reader interested in learning about Nellie Bly.

[ ] c. entertain the reader with Nellie Bly's adventures.

2. Based on the statement from the article, "Although Nellie feared that she might end up trapped behind the walls of the insane asylum forever, she agreed to go ahead with the assignment," you can conclude that the author wants the reader to think that

[ ] a. Nellie was very trusting.

[ ] b. Nellie was terrified by her dangerous assignment.

[ ] c. Nellie was willing to risk her life to get a story.

3. How is the author's purpose for writing the article expressed in paragraph 9?

[ ] a. The author expresses an opinion about the conditions in insane asylums in the late 1800s.

[ ] b. The author informs the reader about the conditions in insane asylums in the late 1800s.

[ ] c. The author describes the effect Nellie's story had on the public.

4. The author tells this story mainly by

[ ] a. retelling one of Nellie's experiences as a journalist.

[ ] b. comparing Nellie to modern journalists.

[ ] c. telling different stories about Nellie Bly's experiences.

___ Number of correct answers

Record your personal assessment of your work on the Critical Thinking Chart on page 198.

CRITICAL THINKING

Summarizing and Paraphrasing

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer for questions 1 and 3. Follow the directions provided for the other question.

1. Below are summaries of the article. Choose the summary that says all the most important things about the article but in the fewest words.

☐ a. Journalist Nellie Bly became a patient in an insane asylum in order to expose the inhumane conditions there.

☐ b. Joseph Pulitzer asked Nellie Bly to investigate and write about an insane asylum for his newspaper. Nellie wrote the article, describing her own experiences in the asylum.

☐ c. Nellie Bly pretended to be insane so that she could become a patient in an asylum.

2. Reread paragraph 7 in the article. Below, write a summary of the paragraph in no more than 25 words.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Reread your summary and decide whether it covers the important ideas in the paragraph. Next, decide how to shorten the summary to 15 words or less without leaving out any essential information. Write this summary below.

_____

_____

_____

3. Read the following statement about the article. Then read the paraphrase of that statement. Choose the reason that best tells why the paraphrase does not say the same thing as the statement.

Statement: Even when Nellie behaved and spoke like a reasonable person, the doctors and nurses at Blackwells Island refused to listen to her.

Paraphrase: The doctors and nurses at Blackwells Island were too busy to listen to Nellie.

☐ a. Paraphrase says too much.

☐ b. Paraphrase doesn't say enough.

☐ c. Paraphrase doesn't agree with the statement about the article.

_____ Number of correct answers

Record your personal assessment of your work on the Critical Thinking Chart on page 198.

Critical Thinking

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer for questions 2 and 4. Follow the directions provided for the other questions.

1. For each statement below, write O if it expresses an opinion and write F if it expresses a fact.

_____ a. The doctors and nurses at Blackwells Island were often cruel to their patients.

_____ b. At the time of her death in 1922, Nelly Bly was the best reporter in America.

_____ c. Patients admitted to Blackwells Island before 1888 had difficulty obtaining a release.

CRITICAL THINKING

2. Based on the information in paragraph 11, you can predict that

☐ a. Nellie would pose as a factory worker to learn about labor unions.

☐ b. Nellie's success would make it easier for other women to work in journalism.

☐ c. male journalists would resent Nellie's success.

3. Choose from the letters below to correctly complete the following statement. Write the letters on the lines.

According to the article, Nellie's story about Blackwells Island caused _____ to _____, and the effect was _____.

a. show concern for the mentally ill

b. the public

c. health inspectors toured the asylum

4. If you were a journalist, how could you use the information in the article to investigate a story?

☐ a. Like Nellie, make sure you have the newspaper owner's support.

☐ b. Like Nellie, get as close to your subject as you can.

☐ c. Like Nellie, pretend to be insane.

5. In which paragraph did you find your information or details to answer question 3?

_____

_____ Number of correct answers

Record your personal assessment of your work on the Critical Thinking Chart on page 198.

Personal Response

Begin the first 5–8 sentences of your own article about someone's efforts to uncover the truth. It may tell of a real experience or one that is imagined.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Self-Assessment

I can't really understand how

_____

_____

_____

_____

CRITICAL THINKING

NAME_____ DATE_____
MS. SNYDER, MSED TESOL

CRITICAL READING SERIES: NELLY BLY

DEVELOPING CRITICAL READING SKILLS.

FILL IN THIS FORM WITH THE ANSWERS FROM THE READING

TIME YOUR READING: BEGIN TIME:_____ END TIME:_____ WPM_____

FINDING THE MAIN IDEA: WRITE M, B, OR N.
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

RECALLING FACTS: WRITE THE CORRECT LETTER
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

MAKING INFERENCES: WRITE C OR F.
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

USING WORDS PRECISELY: WRITE C OR 0, OR N FOR NOTHING.
1. _____ _____ _____
2. _____ _____ _____
3. _____ _____ _____
4. _____ _____ _____
5. _____ _____ _____

CRITICAL READING SCORE: FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS.

FINDING THE MAIN IDEA _____
RECALLING FACTS _____
MAKING INFERENCES _____
USING WORDS PRECISELY _____

CRITICAL READING COMPREHENSION SCORE _____

AUTHOR'S APPROACH:

1._____ 2._____ 3._____ 4_____

SUMMARIZING:

1. _____
2. _____

   _____

   _____

   _____
3. _____

CRITICAL THINKING:
1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4._____ 5._____

WRITING: PERSONAL RESPONSE:

********10 POINT BONUS: ARE THERE ANYMORE NELLY BLY'S TODAY?**

KEEP READING AND STUDYING HARD!!!!

علمت اللغة الانجليزية لحرّة

APPRENDES HABLAR INGLES GRATIS!
APPRENDRE ANGLAIS GRATUIT!
APRENDA EL INGLÉS AHORA!
APPRENEZ L'ANGLAIS AUJOURD'HUI
APRENDA O INGLÊS HOJE
自由のための英語を学びなさい
了解英语为自由

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KEEP STUDYING HARD!!!!!

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THE END!